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Committee on Trade

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Seventieth session
Geneva, 3 – 5 November 2014

Report

I. Introduction

1. The Director of the Economic Cooperation, Trade, and Land Management Division opened the meeting. In her opening remarks the Director noted the continued importance of the Working Party's standards and guidelines as evidenced by the growing number of countries that participate, including Saudi Arabia in the work on dried produce and some Balkan countries in the work on meat. In addition, the Specialized Section on Meat had organized a symposium in September that was attended by 25 countries and over 60 experts from the public, private and academic sectors in order to discuss: consumer research on eating quality; traceability; and quality management. Member states had also appreciated the special promotional events and information on dry and dried produce that had taken place during the past year and which would be continued.

2. The Director thanked all the WP.7 experts and, in particular, the delegations from France and Spain for their support of training workshops and study tours for Greek inspectors which the UNECE had organized as part of the EU funded project on trade facilitation in Greece which had a particular emphasis on agricultural trade.

3. She announced that the secretariat was launching a new project to support the participation of countries from the Western Balkans and Central Asia in cross-border agricultural food supply chains. As part of this project, the secretariat would be developing cooperation on training materials with the OECD and FAO.

4. The Director thanked the outgoing Chair of the Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes, Mr. Pier Giacomo Bianchi (Italy), under whose 14-year-long leadership great progress had been made in the development of the Standard and guides for seed potato growers and inspectors, and who had promoted the Standard all over the world to support production of disease-free seed potatoes.

5. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Ian Hewett (United Kingdom).

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II. Attendance

6. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

7. The European Union was also represented.

8. Representatives of the following non-governmental organization participated in the session: I.N.C. (International Nut and Dried Fruit Council Foundation).

III. Adoption of the agenda

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/1

9. The delegations decided to discuss the topic of food waste related to the application of quality standards under "Other business" and adopted the revised provisional agenda.

IV. Matters of interest since the last session

(a) UNECE and subsidiary bodies

10. The Chief of the Trade Policy and Governmental Cooperation Section informed the delegates of the on-going restructuring exercise of the two committees serviced by the Division. He explained the proposed options stressing that none of them would impact the work of the Working Party or its Specialized Sections, given that member States had unanimously indicated their continued satisfaction with the work on standards setting and, in particular, agricultural quality standards.

(b) Recent developments in other organizations

11. No new information was presented to the Working Party on recent developments in other organizations.

12. The delegations discussed the availability of information on the application of standards in countries. It was pointed out that statistical information about the use of UNECE standards by industry was practically impossible to obtain. However, industry actively participates in the development of the standards which shows the private sector interest in the UNECE standardization work. Also, UNECE standards are translated into languages other than the three working languages of the UNECE.

V. Revision of the Geneva Protocol

Documentation: Geneva Protocol
Draft Geneva Understanding (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/3)

13. The Working Party adopted the text of the "Geneva Understanding", as presented in post-session document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/3. It replaces and supersedes the Geneva Protocol of 1985.

Agenda items 4-7

14. The chairpersons of the specialized sections and the secretariat presented the work of the sections since the 2013 meeting of the Working Party, as well as current and future activities. The presentations are available on the UNECE website at: http://www.unece.org/trade/wp-7/meetings.html.

VI. Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

Documentation: Report of the twenty-third session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.11/2014/2)
Processed poultry meat (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/17)

15. The Working Party adopted the new UNECE Standard for Processed Poultry Meat, including ready-to-cook preparations and ready-to-eat products. It took note of the Meat symposium organized on the occasion of the Specialized Section's annual session in September 2014 as well as of the discussions on consumer research on eating quality.

VII. Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

Documentation: Report of the forty-second session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/2)
Seed potatoes (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/15)
Guide to field inspection (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/16)

16. The Working Party approved the revised Standard for Seed Potatoes and the UNECE Guide to Seed Potato Field Inspection. It also approved the initiation of work on the UNECE Guide to Operating a Seed Potato Certification Service.

VIII. Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

Documentation: Report of the sixty-second session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2014/2)
Quince (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/4)
Apples (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/5)
Plums (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/6)
Sweet chestnuts (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/7)
Lambs lettuce (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/8)
Chicory (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/9)
Figs (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/10)
Chanterelles (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/11)
Truffles (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/12)
Apricots (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/13)
Chinese cabbage (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/14)

17. The Working Party approved:

- the new Standard for Quince;
- the revised standards for plums, chicory, figs, chanterelles, apricots and Chinese cabbage;

- the revised texts of the standards for sweet chestnuts and the draft text for lambs lettuce as recommendations for a one-year trial period;
- the prolongation of the trial period for the current recommendation for persimmons for one more year.

18. The delegation of France revisited its proposal made at the 2014 session of the Specialized Section on the amendments to the definition of produce in the Standard for Truffles and suggested that the UNECE Standard be aligned with the forthcoming French regulation at the 2015 session of the Specialized Section.

19. The Working Party was informed that on 31 October the secretariat received written correspondence from the World Apple and Pear Association (WAPA) – an observer to the work of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables – and from the delegation of Belgium supporting the position of WAPA not to restructure the List of Varieties in the Standard for Apples.

20. The Working Party was also informed about the proposal by the delegation of the Netherland (received on 30 October) to amend the List of Varieties. All the above-mentioned inputs will appear as post-session documents on the UNECE website.

21. The Working Party discussed the position of WAPA with regard to the List of Varieties. Some delegations shared WAPA's concern related to the structure and length of the list. Other delegations supported the List as had been submitted to the Working Party for approval. For them the List was informative, easy to use by inspectors and flexible enough to reflect the developments in the market. The marking requirements in the Standard only prescribe the indication of the variety as obligatory, leaving the indication of mutants as an option.

22. The Working Party agreed that the principle of consistency in the countries' position at the sessions of the Specialized Section and the Working Party should not be compromised.

23. The Working Party adopted the revised Standard for Apples and the amendments to the List of Varieties recommended by the Specialized Section, i.e. the inclusion of miniature varieties Oliver and PremA96; deletion of varieties Alice, Katja and Kim; replacing the colour group A by C for Star Delicious, Starking and Starkspur; and assigning colour group D to varieties without surface colour. The Working Party asked the Specialized Section to re-discuss the issue of restructuring the List of Varieties, using the correspondence received from WAPA and the delegation of the Netherlands.

IX. Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce

Documentation: Report of the sixty-first session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.2/2014/2)
Dried pineapples (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/19)
Inshell walnuts (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/20)
Dried grapes (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/21)
Sampling plans (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/22)
Dried apricots (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/23)
Dried figs (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/24)
Inshell Pistachio Nuts (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/18)
Brochure for Inshell Walnuts

24. The Working Party adopted the texts of the new UNECE Standard for Dried Pineapples, the revised text of the UNECE Standard for Inshell Walnuts and for Inshell Pistachio Nuts. It adopted the draft Brochure for Inshell Walnuts for publication.

25. The Working Party adopted the texts of the revised draft Standard for Dried Grapes and the new draft UNECE Sampling Plans for Tree Nuts and Dried Produce as UNECE Recommendations for a one-year trial period and extended the trial period of the UNECE Recommendations for Dried Apricots and for Dried Figs for another year. An electronic working group led by Turkey will advance discussions on the Standards for Dried Grapes, Dried Apricots and Dried Figs prior to the June 2015 session of the Specialized Section.

26. The Working Party decided to suspend the work on the Standard for Dried Cranberries.

X. Capacity-building activities

27. The secretariat informed the Working Party about the resources that had been made available from the Russian Voluntary Contribution Fund to support the work on the explanatory brochure for dried apricots[1], guides to seed potato tuber inspection and operating a seed potato certification service, as well as to finance the setting up of a biotechnological laboratory to produce disease-free seed potatoes meeting the requirements of the UNECE Standard in the northern region of Arkhangelsk, Russian Federation.

28. The secretariat also informed the Working Party about capacity-building activities in 2014 and planned activities for 2015 in the area of fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and dried produce. Particular attention was drawn to the agri-food component of the trade facilitation roadmap which the secretariat had helped implement in Greece and for which activities had been organized in Greece, France and Spain. The delegates received information about the UN Development Account project on cross-border agricultural supply chains including business process analyses in the two target regions (Central Asia - Tajikistan (Dried Apricots) and Western Balkans - Albania (beans)), on an inventory of training material, as well as on the scheduled workshop in Albania in April 2015. It was also mentioned that possibilities to hold a training workshop in Turkey in combination with the International Nut and Dried Fruit Council's meeting would be explored with the relevant national authorities and organizers. The secretariat will send out more information on all these activities and dates in due course.

29. The Working Party took note of the following promotional, training and capacity-building activities:

- Thirtieth International Meeting on Quality Control of Fruit and Vegetables (Bonn, Germany, 9-11 March 2015)
- The OECD Meeting of the Heads of National Inspection Services (Poland, May 2014)
- The 19th UK Harmonization Meeting (Edinburgh, United Kingdom, July 2014)
- OECD Peer Review of the Finnish Inspection Service (Finland, 9-11 September 2014)

[1] Subject to the approval of the Specialized Section on Dry and Dried Produce (GE.2).

XI. Other business

30. The delegations exchanged views on and the way forward in addressing food waste concerns within quality standards. Food waste is an area of concern in many countries. The Working Party recommended that all specialized sections consider if this topic would be appropriate for their work. It was also suggested that, at its 2015 session, the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables start work on a limited number of products to see what issues and provisions could be addressed from the point of view of reducing waste.

XII. Future work

31. The following meetings are planned for 2015:

- Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables: 21-24 April
- Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce: 29 June - 2 July
- Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat: 28-30 September
- Working Party: 2-4 November.

XIII. Election of officers

32. The delegations re-elected Mr. Ian Hewett (United Kingdom) as Chair and elected Ms. Agnieszka Sudol (Poland) as Vice-Chair.

XIV. Adoption of the report

33. The Working Party adopted the report of the session.